

Parameters Form

State	NSW
Division	Middle School
School/Group	MacKillop College
Team Name	Chaos Theory
Team ID	514

Parameters

Primary character 1	Photographer
Primary character 2	Monk
Non-human character	Didgeridoo
Setting	Stable
Issue	Hidden treasure

Random words

Silver
patch
clock
struggle
prickly

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Dedications

We dedicate this book to all children experiencing sickness, disease and injury and patients in children's hospitals.

Message of goodwill

We wish you luck on your journey and we want you to know that you are strong. No matter who you are or where you are, there are people to love and support you. Even in the darkness, there is light and it will guide you to happiness.

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A SILVER PATH TO GOLD

Chapter 1



“I’ve taught you all that I can, Jamie,” her father’s voice echoed in her head as she crossed the field tinted with dust, the heat pressing against her skin a ceaseless reminder of her journey. Jamie couldn’t stop running the conversation with her father through her head. It was now as prominent in her life as her weary boots and the half-worn camera she carried around her neck, both held together by determination and a few strips of duct tape.

“Now, I’m too weak to teach you any more about our ancestors,” Jamie’s father had said, his frail body tucked under a blanket that barely shifted with each carefully-measured movement. “You must continue your journey alone.”

“What d’you mean?” She had asked him.

Her father gestured vaguely at the leather bag tucked into the shelf beside the bed. “Can you bring that bag for me?”

Jamie remembered reaching for the bag, feeling the strap pull tight against her fingers as she lifted it and gently placed it on her father’s lap. She remembered his fingers, shaking but still determined, unzipping the bag and carefully lifting a long hollow instrument from its cover.

“Do you remember this?” her father had asked. Jamie had not, but she felt a link to the instrument that still lingered - even now as she trekked through the dusty grasslands.

“You called this **Silver** when you were younger,” her father mused, the crow’s feet in the corners of his eyes crinkling further at the fond memory. The beauty of the silver, red and yellow paint compelled Jamie to touch the didgeridoo. “I had to put it away when you were teething, because I was afraid of what your teeth could do.”

“Dad...” Even in his old age, Jamie’s father still enjoyed a laugh.

“A Mimi lives inside this didgeridoo,” Jamie’s father told her. His voice had lowered to a reverent hush.

“A Mimi?”

“The Mimi are spirit people. They care for the earth, and showed our ancestors how to harness fire.”

Jamie was doubtful, but she couldn’t deny the spiritual pull she felt every time she drew near to the instrument. Now that the didgeridoo was free of the bag, it had awakened a yearning to treasure the instrument. It felt almost like it was communicating with her.

“I need you to do something for me,” her father had continued quietly. “The Mimi will help you. Do you remember the old stable? The one we used to visit during the holidays?”

Jamie nodded. She and her father had often visited the stable out in the country before her father had grown too frail to drive. Their trip had taken them far from their Sydney home into the outback on their rusty ute, and when they arrived Jamie would ride horses with her father and feel wood-smoke brush her face as she roasted marshmallows on an open fire. But those memories were faded and distant - they hadn’t visited in such a long time.

She had grown too busy caring for her father to worry about herself, but sometimes she felt a twinge of sadness and wondered what her life would have been like if she froze time when her father was whole and well.

Jamie’s father had taken her hand within his, his soft brown eyes catching her gaze. “It’s very important to me that you take this Mimi and return it to the stable. To the earth. The Mimi will guide you.”

Jamie couldn’t refuse her father’s wish. “I will.”

Her father nodded and sunk back into the pillows. He studied the didgeridoo, his eyes focused on a single marking. It was tall, human-shaped and wavering - the Mimi. It seemed to swim before Jamie’s eyes as if it were alive.

The **clock** hanging on the wall had ticked loudly in their silence.

The memory ended abruptly when Jamie stumbled over a stone jutting out of the path. Sucking in a panicked breath, she corrected herself, the dust swirling around her boots. She automatically touched the didgeridoo strapped to her bag to confirm that it was still safe. *Idiot*, she chided herself.

Lifting her head, Jamie shaded her eyes with a hand and glanced around. The bus has deposited her an irritating distance from her destination, and the sun wasn’t helping her situation. At least she had time to collect her thoughts before she reached the stable.

The stable... Even if she didn’t remember it exactly, Jamie still held fond feelings within her mind. She remembered the earthy tones of wood and the soft grey stone that held the building together. She remembered the comforting smell of horses and their calm, steady gazes. She remembered galloping across the fields, moving as one with her horse, soaring over logs and bracken.

There were so many scenic spots to photograph, too. Jamie hoped her camera wouldn’t break with the amount of photos she imagined herself taking. Excitement grew within her like a brilliant ball of flame, overshadowing the ball of nerves twisting in her stomach.

Chapter 2



The air swayed before her, shimmering heat waves and beyond that, the stable. Jamie stepped forward, the **prickly** grass crunching under her feet. Her knees were weak. Her vision blurred from her tears. She was really here. One foot moved, almost of its own violation. She found herself moving closer and closer to the stone structure. Soon enough, she stood at the door, sweating harder than the heat warranted, her heart thumping in her ears. She reached for the doors, steeling her nerves, but before she could touch it, it swung inwards.

“Who are you?” She asked harshly, glaring at the tall, dark figure standing before her.

The silhouette stepped into the light revealing a dark-skinned man. Avoiding making eye contact she glanced downwards, discovering that his body was covered by a long, brown robe with a red sash across his chest.

“I’m Neil,” his voice was rusty from disuse, a low baritone. She didn’t know what to say.

“I take care of the horses,” he explained, “your father hired me and I agreed, as it is peaceful here.”

Jamie felt a stab of sudden anger. What did this man know about her father? She shifted her bag on her back and the didgeridoo dug into her leg. Her anger dissipated as she remembered why she was here. Her father.

Her mouth felt dry. “My father?”

“Sorry, I just assumed...” he said. “You look like my boss.”

“Your boss?” Jamie questioned.

“Well um... yeah. The owner of this place.” Neil hesitated, feeling as if he was being interrogated. “Mr Michaels.”

At the mention of her father’s name, Jamie felt the tears from earlier well up again.

“Yeah,” she paused, trying to control her emotions. “Yeah, that’s my father - he sent me here.”

Neil looked uncomfortable, scuffing his sandals on the ground.

“Do you want to come in?” he offered.

Jamie nodded and Neil stepped aside to let her in. She stepped over the threshold into the dimmed room and Neil followed. Jamie stood in the centre of the space, breathing in the cool air and feeling sudden relief from the harsh Australian outback.

“Do you live here?” she asked Neil.

“Ah...yeah, yeah I do...” he trailed off, rubbing absentmindedly at the stubble on his head; a shave being a bit overdue.

Cutting through the silence, a voice called out from one of her bags. Jamie, startled, spun around searching for the source.

“Hey! Let me out!” The voice started to shout.

“What the...” she trailed off as the voice continued to demand freedom.

Neil slowed to a stop, feeling increasingly concerned “Is something wrong?”

Jamie ignored his worry and fumbled for the bag, unzipping it to reveal the didgeridoo inside. Emblazoned onto the didgeridoo, a small silver Mimi paced back and forth.

“Took you long enough!” the Mimi quipped. “You finally brought me back here!”

The Mimi moved around as if gesturing in speech. Jamie, stunned speechless, started down at the chirping painting, quivering as it spoke.

“Is that picture moving?” questioned Neil, ashen-faced. Jamie nodded mutely.

The Mimi twitched as if sensing an awkward feeling of mixed confusion and shock.

“Since you’re here, I suppose that you want me to tell you where the treasure is?” The Mimi said as it danced across the intricate dot painting decorating the didgeridoo.

“Treasure? What treasure?” Jamie asked, looking puzzled.

“Treasure?” Neil repeated, unable to hear the Mimi speak, feeling as though he was only hearing one side of a phone conversation.

Jamie looked at Neil, confused.

“Can you hear Mimi speak?” She asked.

“Mimi?” Neil asked. “I can’t hear anything”

“The Mimi is the painted figure.” Jamie pointed at the didgeridoo. “It says that it can show us where the treasure is... whatever it is,” Jamie explained to Neil to clear up the confusion - without much success.

Neil looked at the Mimi in confusion, and the Mimi waved a miniature hand back.

“That’s not what I said by the way, but I did say I could *tell* you where it is. Only if you’re interested, you’ll find a map at the well... Anyway, wake me up when you find it!” The Mimi fell silent and gradually stopped moving.

Jamie zipped up the bag, still unable to speak and began to ponder the Mimi’s words.

Chapter 3



“It says to look at the well,” Jamie said, for Neil’s sake. “I don’t remember seeing a well on my way here.” Jamie furrowed her brows and ran her free hand through her hair, trying to remember if she had seen anything besides the small vegetable **patch** out the front of the stable.

“That’s because you came in from the front,” Neil replied. “The well is through the back, at the top of the hill. It’ll be a bit of a trek.” He turned towards the back door and gestured her to follow.

Taking a mouthful of water, Jamie complied, slinging the didgeridoo bag over her shoulder as she went.

They stepped back outside into the heat. Jamie looked up at the hill and decided to take one last swig from her water bottle before screwing on the cap and throwing it back towards her bag. Seeing she was ready to go, Neil closed the stable door. Jamie checked that the didgeridoo bag was properly zipped up, and started towards the hill.

Together they moved forward. Soon enough, Jamie saw a well, oddly-placed at the bottom of the hill.

“Didn’t you say the well was at the top?” she asked.

“Not that one... The old well is up there.” Neil gestured towards another well situated at the top of the hill. “I built the new one about eight months ago, so I know there’s nothing hidden in it.”

“Why would you build another well?” Jamie gestured at the new well in confusion.

“The well at the top is mostly dried up. You can’t draw water out of it without getting a bucketful of mud, but it was here first, so it’s more likely to be the one with the map.” Neil continued to walk up the hill, leaving Jamie to catch up.

“Wait! You said built the new one,” Jamie called as she ran to catch up. “How did you *build* a well?”

Neil laughed. “A lot of digging, mostly. I had to hire someone to put the stones in.”

A compassionate silence filled the air until the duo reached halfway up the hill. Jamie was fiddling with the strap of the didgeridoo bag when Neil decided to start talking.

“So, how’s your father been?” He asked. “He was coughing quite a bit the last time I saw him; he looked pretty sick.”

Jamie tensed up and stopped climbing the gentle slope. She thought of her father, lying, sick and frail in his bed and she fell silent. Neil saw her tense up and tried to change the subject.

“So, what’s with the didgeridoo? That picture looked like it was moving...”

“Yeah,” Jamie smiled and started climbing again. “It holds a Mimi. It’s like... a spiritual guide. My father asked to return it here.”

“Sounds like a journey,” he mused. “Was it talking to you?”

“Yeah!” Jamie laughed, surprised. “It hadn’t done that before, so I was just as shocked as you were.”

Neil nodded, looking back down at the stable. This piqued Jamie’s interest.

“What have you been doing around here?”

“Your father hired me to take care of the stable and the land. This job gave me a place where I can live and pray in peace. I also really like the horses so it is a win-win situation,” Neil answered, glancing toward the well that was just coming into view.

They quickly reached the top of the hill and looked around. Jamie thought the view of the barn was beautiful and regretted leaving her camera in the stable. The sun was coming closer to setting and the dusky shadows seemed like something out of a painting.

They moved towards the well. The rough stone felt cool under Jamie’s hand, but she refused to touch the wood of the roofing in fear of splinters.

While they were inspecting the well, the Mimi’s voice reached Jamie’s ears, sounding muffled through the bag. “Go into the well.”

Jamie lent the bag against the well and reached out to grab the bucket.

“I need to go inside the well,” she told Neil as she pulled a Swiss Army Knife from her pocket to cut the rope free from the bucket. Deftly, she tied the rope around her waist. Neil grabbed the handle and held it tightly so the rope would catch Jamie if she fell. She slipped into the well and started her slow descent as Neil wound the handle to keep the rope slack.

“Be careful!” Neil called after her.

Chapter 4



Jamie's feet landed suddenly on the slushy mud at the bottom of the dark well, her ankles quickly becoming soaked with the dirt. Only able to see the faint line separating the mud and the walls of the well, Jamie tried to spot anything out of place.

She stuck her hand into the muddy filth covering the ground. After searching every bit of the well's bottom and only finding a few small bones that probably belonged to a small rodent, there seemed to be no hidden compartments that could contain the map. Eventually, she gave up on her search through the sludge, and tried her best to shake off the mud from her hands.

"Have you found anything yet?" Neil yelled down at her.

"Not yet," Jamie called.

Finally, her hands struck gold. Feeling up the wall in the dark, there seemed to be a set of uniform cracks that formed a rectangle. The bottom edge seemed to have a locking mechanism consisting of two latches. After Jamie flipped one latch at a time, the lid to the container didn't budge. Resetting the lock, she tried again, this time flipping the latches at the same time. With a click, the section of wall lifted, and without a **struggle**, the lid simply flipped open to reveal the map inside. Tied in a scroll with a brown string, the map was still in good condition.

"Neil, I found it!" Jamie shouted.

She wiped her hands on her shirt, trying not to get anything on the map. Looking upwards, she considered how she would get out. She would need both hands to climb...

Jamie put the string tied around the map in her mouth while she grasped the rope. She tugged on it twice, telling Neil to start winding it up. She dug her fingers into the cracks and pulled herself upwards. When she reached the top, she dragged herself over the edge and onto the ground.

"Are you okay?" Neil asked, grabbing her wrist to pull her to her feet.

Grabbing the map from her mouth, Jamie laughed. "I found the map!" she crowed victoriously.

"Let's get back to the stable," Neil suggested. "It's going to get too dark to climb down soon."

Jamie grabbed the bag and moved towards Neil but an inescapable feeling made her pause. Slowly, she unzipped the bag and pulled out the didgeridoo. She walked back to the well and lent the didgeridoo against the stone.

"Thank you," said the Mimi, going still.

Jamie turned around, satisfied, and started to head back to the stable, trailing Neil and grinning from ear to ear.

Back in the stable, they untied the brown string and unrolled the map, using Jamie's drink bottle and their hands to keep the edges from curling up. They found the whole stable mapped out, from the upstairs area and the stables to the support beams.

"It's the stable," Neil stated, confused.

Located in the bottom left hand corner, a big red X marked one of the stalls.

They twisted the map to make sure it was facing the right way, and moved toward the stable marked with the X. Jamie stopped just before the stall.

"We'll have to move the horse," Jamie said.

"We can move it to another stall," Neil replied. "This horse is pretty tame."

As the pair started to open the heavy wooden gate, the grey horse began to shift. As soon as it was open wide enough, the horse trotted out, straight past the two and into the main area of the stable.

"We could just leave it there for now," Jamie suggested, glancing at the closed doors. "It's not going anywhere."

Neil nodded in agreement, seeming more concerned with finding the treasure.

They both cautiously walked into the stall, searching the ground. Neil walked over to the opposite wall and got a broom to clean the poo and hay away.

Neil started sweeping, going from one corner to the other, meticulously brushing out the hay and the poo and making sure to check everything underneath. Eventually, they were able to spot a loose plank of wood. Jamie dug her fingers underneath, trying to lift it.

"Here, let me try," Neil moved beside her and grasped the plank, pulling up as hard as he could.

"Do you have a hammer?" Jamie asked. "One you could remove nails with?"

She gestured at the loose nail holding the plank down.

"I... think so," Neil responded, uncertain.

Neil quickly searched for a hammer and brought it back to her just as fast. Jamie grabbed the hammer and eagerly started to pry the nail out from the wood.

Once she removed that plank, she could see the edge of what looked like a trapdoor. She moved backwards and pried out a couple more nails, revealing the whole trapdoor underneath. She fumbled with the latch and lifted the trapdoor, finding a deep hole and a ladder leading downwards into the dark.

"Woah..." Neil said. "It's hard to believe this was here the whole time, and I never noticed."

“Should I go down?” Jamie asked hesitantly.

Neil twisted his hands together, nervously. “Do you want me to go first...?”

“Ladies first,” she joked wryly, gesturing at the hole.

As Neil made his way down, Jamie ran to get a torch from her bag. When she returned, Neil had reached the bottom and was trying to feel his way around the pitch black room. Jamie turned on the torch and shined it down the hole.

“I’ve got some light!” Jamie exclaimed.

“Good, pass it down.” Neil reached up a hand, and Jamie lent into the hole and deposited the torch into his palm.

Jamie extracted her head from the hole and stood up straight, stretching her back. She wasn’t looking forward to being trapped under mounds of earth.

Jamie slowly climbed down the ladder while Neil explored the room. As she reached the bottom, Neil turned the torch towards her feet.

“Come over here,” he said. “I think I’ve found something.”

Jamie made her way over, finding Neil examining a chest the size of a large packing box.

“Is there a lock on it?” Jamie asked, her curiosity emerging.

“Doesn’t look like it - I can’t seem to lift it though,” Neil replied, discouraged.

Jamie immediately tried to pull it open. Her efforts achieved nothing.

“Can you help me?” she asked Neil “We can probably lift it together.”

They each grabbed the edge and pulled. At first it didn’t seem to work, but after a few heaves the lid flipped open.

“Woah...”

Light, shimmering iridescently against the torch, gleamed against Jamie’s shocked face. She stared in awe at the chunks of gold nestled between the old, dry hay, twinkling like miniature suns.

She and Neil stood, wide-eyed and open mouthed, taking in what they had found. As the torch shifted minutely something caught Jamie’s eye from between the gold. She could never mistake a Polaroid.

She gently removed the photograph from its nest. The contents of the photo left her more shocked than the gold had. It was a photo of her parents.

Her father, unmistakable, stood next to a woman with curly brown hair, who clutched a serious-faced bundle that must have been Jamie. Jamie traced her fingers over the photograph as if it was the most precious treasure.

Neil had fallen silent. Tears slid down Jamie’s cheeks; tears of sadness, but also joy. Her father had left this for her. Her father had left her a future.

“What are you going to do now?” Neil asked quietly.

Jamie wiped her cheek. “I... I’m going to make myself a home. Go to university, do a course in photography. And then... I’m going to find my mom.”

“Maybe I can help,” Neil proposed.

“Are you serious?” Jamie asked, tilting her head. “You’d come with me?”

Neil shrugged, nonchalant. “It’s sort of boring here.”

Jamie smiled at him, and glanced at the gold. “Yeah, it’s pretty boring.”

As they climbed out of the trapdoor to get a bag to carry the gold, Jamie stopped to clutch the photo to her chest and silently thank her father. How he had managed this, she didn’t know, but she was forever grateful that he had. She looked at Neil, her new family, and in her mind’s eye, she could see the Mimi as it danced with other spirits deep in the earth. Jamie laughed, and started to move.

Another journey had begun.